A REDEFINITION OF THE CLIENTELE FOR AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

BY

GERALD BLAINE JAMES

B.S., North Corolina State College, 1947
M.S., North Carolina State College, 1948

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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The Problem

The study dealt with redefining the clientele for agricultural education with special attention to Illinois. Emphasis was placed upon determining the male farm clientele for vocational education in agriculture. Consideration was given to: (1) ascertaining who were receiving agricultural education in the public schools, (2) developing procedures for ascertaining the attitudes of adult farmers toward adult education in agriculture, and (3) developing procedures for ascertaining the agricultural education needs of the adult male farm clientele.

Need For The Study

Federally aided vocational education in agriculture was first established in the secondary schools in the United States in 1917 with the passage of the "Smith-Hughes Act." In 1952 there were 9,786 departments of vocatonal agriculture in the secondary schools throughout the nation.

Varying philosophies have governed these many departments since their beginning. Leaders in agricultural education have promoted their particular views and beliefs. Consequently, certain phases of the total program have been greatly neglected. Generally work with high school boys has been emphasized most strongly. Relatively little time has been devoted to others.

Procedure In Conducting The Study

The study was divided into two general phases: (1) ascertaining who were receiving agricultural education in the public schools in Illinois, and (2) developing procedures for ascer-

taining the attitudes of adult farmers toward adult education in agriculture and for ascertaining the agricultural education needs of the adult male farm clientele.

Phase 1: Who Were Receiving Agricultural Education in The Public Schools in Illinois?

Two main sources of information were used:

1. A summary of the 1950-1951 annual reports of teachers of vocational agriculture in Illinois to the State Board of Vocational Education was analyzed to ascertain who were receiving agricultural education in federally reimbursed departments of vocational agriculture throughout the state.

2. Reports in the office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of courses offered in all public high schools and public junior colleges in the state were analyzed to ascertain who were receiving agricultural education in the public schools other than federally reimbursed vocational education in agriculture.

Phase 2: Developing Procedures for Ascertaining the Attitudes of Adult Farmers Toward Adult Education in Agriculture and for Ascertaining the Agricultural Education Needs of the Adult Male Farm Clientele

A. Selecting Pilot Centers

This phase of the study was one part of a larger project in agricultural education under the Illinois Curriculum Program.

It was decided that working rather closely with a small number of well selected communities would give more useful information than attempting to cover a much broader area in less detail. Six schools in the state which had asked for assistance in replanning their programs of agricultural education were selected. In three of the centers the groups worked with preferred to postpone action because of local conditions or were uncertain as to what approach should be made.

Further work with these three centers was not included in the study.

B. Working With the Pilot Centers

This phase of the study was based upon one year of work in the three remaining centers. The project will continue for three years.

All three of the centers had active advisory councils for agricultural education when they were selected for this study.

In this part of the larger project the writer and other members of the staff in Agricultural Education of the University of Illinois worked closely with the teachers of agriculture, agricultural advisory councils, and other individuals, and committees within the school arganizations to aid in developing procedures for ascertaining the attitudes of adult farmers toward adult education in agriculture and for ascertaining the agricultural education needs of the adult male farm clientele.

They decided upon surveys involving personal interviews with representative adult farmers. Numerous other sources of information were used for ascertaining the agricultural education needs of the adult male farm clientele. Some of these have been listed on pages 11 - 12.

Types of information they wished to gather were decided upon in each center after consulting with representatives of the University and studying what had been done in other schools. Questions were arranged by members of the staff of the Division of Agricultural Education so as to make the data easy to record and tabulate.

Random sampling procedures were used to select farmers to be interviewed in each of the three school districts. The numbers of farmers selected were 108, 70, and 180 in the three communities. The fact that a survey was to be conducted was publicized in each of the communities prior to the interviewing. The publicity included information about the

purposes of the surveys, how the surveys would be conducted, and who would do the interviewing. Some means of publicity used were newspaper articles; personal contacts by advisory council members, board members, teachers of agriculture, and members of affiliated committees; and a mimeographed letter to each farmer to be interviewed. Announcements over the public address system at the county fair were used in one center. The writer and two assistants visited the selected farmers and secured usable information from 100, 70, and 154 in the districts which comprised samples of approximately 25 per cent, 18 per cent, and 18 per cent of all farmers in the districts.

The findings of the surveys were summarized and presented in mimeographed form to the councils. No written conclusions by the writer were presented to the councils. Some possible interpretations of data were indicated to council members by members of the staff of the Division of Agricultural Education. However, the councils were free to draw their own conclusions from the summaries of data.

Summary And Conclusions

Phase 1: Who Were Receiving Agricultural Education in the Public Schools in Illinois?

During the 1950-1951 school year 499 of the 705 four-year public high schools in Illinois offered courses in vocational agriculture. They served 16,875 hgh school boys, 8,628 adults, 903 young farmers, and 7,089 veterans, or a total of 33,495 men and boys.

Only 15 of the 705 public high schools offered courses in agriculture other than federally reimbursed vocational agriculture. There were 241 boys and 33 girls enrolled in these courses during the 1950-1951 school year.

Only one of the 14 approved public junior colleges offered an agriculture course during the 1950-1951 school year. Approximately 30 adult farmers were enrolled in the course.

These 30 have been included in the 8,628 adults reached through courses in vocational agriculture.

The 33,769 individuals who received some type of agricultural education through the public schools during 1950-1951 comprised 0.4 per cent of the 8,712,176 people in the state.

They comprised 1.7 per cent of the rural population and 5.7 per cent of the rural farm population 15 years of age and over.

The adults taught comprised only 3.3 per cent of the rural farm people 21 years of age and over and 6.4 per cent of the male rural farm group 21 years of age and over.

The high school boys enrolled in vocational agriculture comprised 11.2 per cent of the Illinois boys in public high schools.

Phase 2: Developing Procedures for Ascertaining the Attitudes of Adult Farmers Toward Adult Education in Agriculture and for Ascertaining the Agricultural Education Needs of the Adult Male Farm Clientele

A. Summary and Conclusions from Data Gathered by Surveys in the Three Centers.

1. Fifty-three per cent of the farmers interviewed reported eighth grade or lower as the highest grade in school completed.

2. The average of highest grades in school completed by farmers interviewed was slightly above grade nine.

3. Eighteen per cent of the farmers had studied vocational agriculture in high school; 13 per cent had been enrolled in classes for farm veterans; 13 per cent had been enrolled in adult farmer classes; and 49 per cent had attended one or more extension meetings during the preceding year; however, only 21 per cent had attended more than three extension meetings and only seven per cent had attended five or more meetings.

4. The teachers of vocational agriculture in two of the centers had visited 17 and 29 per cent of the farmers interviewed during the preceding year. The percentages of farmers in the three centers who desired to receive visits were 73, 83, and 87.

5. Seventy-three per cent of the farmers interviewed desired to attend adult farmer or young farmer classes and 82 per cent desired to have the teacher of vocational agriculture visit them on their farms.

a. Eighty-six per cent of the farmers who had been enrolled in vocational agriculture in high school desired to attend adult farmer classes; 93 per cent desired to receive visits from the teacher of vocational agriculture.

b. Eighty-eight per cent of the farmers who had been enrolled in veterans' classes desired to attend adult classes; 98 per cent desired to receive visits.

c. Ninety-five per cent of the farmers who had attended adult farmer classes desired to attend more adult classes; 98 per cent desired to receive visits.

d. Eighty per cent of the farmers who had attended one or more extension meetings during the preceding year desired to attend adult farmer classes; 89 per cent desired to receive visits. However, 84 per cent who had attended five or more extension meetings during the preceding year desired to attend adult classes, and 95 per cent desired to receive visits.

e. Ninety-four per cent of the farmers who had been visited by the teacher of vocational agriculture during the preceding year desired to attend adult or young farmer classes; 89 per cent desired to continue to receive on-farm visits. The number of visits desired per year by the farmers who desired visits ranged from two through 24. The median

numbers of visits desired in two centers were 3.1 and 3.7. Several farmers stated that more visits would be desirable, but they realized that there was danger of "over-working" the teacher of agriculture.

These data indicate that farmers who had received systematic education in agriculture found it beneficial. They evidently found the visits by the teachers of agriculture beneficial since a high percentage desired visits. Apparently the farmers interviewed had not received in school the amount of agricultural education that they want and can use.

B. Developments in the Centers Since the Surveys Were Conducted

Approximately one year after the surveys were conducted in the three pilot centers the writer visited each center. He talked with available teachers of agriculture, present and past agricultural advisory council members, administrators, members of boards of education, and some farmers who had been and some who had not been interviewed during the surveys.

The survey in one center indicated that 88 farmers in the district would be interested in attending a course in Farm Management. A course was organized in that subject which had an enrollment of 45 farmers. It indicated that 24 farmers would be interested in a welding course. Fifteen were enrolled in a course in that subject.

Seven courses in which farmers had expressed interest were held in the three centers.

The persons interviewed a year after the studies were made appeared to value the studies. Some of the benefits of the studies most freguently mentioned by those interviewed were:

1. It improved farmer-patron relations with the total school system and especially with the agriculture department.

2. Farm people learned more about the agriculture department and the advisory council and gained a greater

appreciation of both.

3. It caused people to begin talking and thinking about the type of agricultural education they need and want.

4. It gave the council data to present to the board and administrators rather than their opinions and judgements alone.

5. It made the board of education and administrators more aware of the desires and needs of farm people.

6. It established a method of ascertaining desires and needs and a method of improving relations with school patrons which administrators and teachers in other departments have noticed and think that they may be able to use to an advantage.

7. Farmers were impressed with the studies. They appeared to like the idea of being contacted regarding school affairs. They appreciated the fact that someone was interested in their educational welfare.

8. The survey indicated to the board, administrators, and public that the agriculture departments can be of much more service than they have been in the past. It made them realize that the departments have functions beyond serving high school boys.

9. It served as a basis for planning a long-time program.

10. The survey showed board members that on-farm supervision is desired and is not just something "pitched in extra." It showed that those who had been enrolled and had received follow-up visits desired that the visits be continued.

C. Summary and Conclusions Regarding Procedures Used

1. Position of the Writer in the Study

In this part of the larger project the writer and other members of the staff in the Division of Agricultural Education of the University of Illinois worked closely with the teachers of agriculture, agricultural advisory councils, and other indi-

viduals and groups within the school organizations for a one-year period. Techniques and procedures were worked out as the study proceeded. The writer and members of the staff in agricultural education served as resource persons and consultants, and sought to facilitate group action and interaction in leading toward possible solutions to problems. Care was taken to feed ideas or suggestions into group processes within the various communities without "forcing" ideas or procedures upon the groups. Democratic procedures and the importance of sound group operation were held foremost throughout the study.

The writer familiarized himself with the communities through visits, study of census data, and other means. He became familiar with techniques and procedures used by other schools to aid him in feeding information into group processes in the pilot schools.

From the beginning it was recognized that procedures for ascertaining the attitudes of adult farmers toward adult education in agriculture and for ascertaining the agricultural education needs of the adult male farm clientele could not be decided by an "outsider" imposing "outside" methods upon a community. Thus, the procedures were decided by the local communities, after consulting with members of the staff of the Division of Agricultural Education and studying what had been done elsewhere.

2. Involvement of Large Numbers of People in the Study

Large numbers of people were involved in planning and initiating the studies. Advisory councils, special committees, and consultants were used. Data were secured from a large number of farmers through interviews. The data were useful in locating and defining agricultural education needs of adult farmers. Their attitudes toward adult education in agriculture were also secured.

3. Securing Information for Ascertaining Agricultural Education Needs of Farmers

There are many procedures within a community which may be helpful in ascertaining the agricultural education needs of farmers. Some which the writer regards as successful or promising are:

a. studying the educational and agricultural deficiencies of adults,

b. examining census and other similar data,

c. examining farming procedures and techniques used,

d. studying requests of individuals and groups,

e. maintaining liaison groups such as advisory councils and committees between possible clientele and the public schools,

f. maintaining liaison people between the agriculture department and community organizations, businesses, agricultural agencies, and other educational institutions and organizations,

g. promoting and maintaining extensive personal acquaintance with community leaders and groups,

h. being sensitive to and analyzing personal and group agricultural problems that may be solved by education,

i. making systematic surveys of farming, farm life, and farm progress,

j. securing the opinions of people,

k. ascertaining the interest of people,

l. using checklists and other opinion, interest, and deficiency finders, and

m. making follow-up studies of graduates.

4. Using Information in Ascertaining Needs

The interpretation of information is perhaps one of the

most important phases of determining the needs of a community. Errors in interpretation may be as misleading in developing a community agricultural education program as securing improper or biased information. All sources of information and all instruments for securing the information should be carefully evaluated. Information must be valid, accurate, pertinent to the problem, representative of the total situation, and consistent with other information. Sources must be reliable and dependable, and all summaries and other treatments must be valid and correct.

Interpretations of data should be by experienced, capable, and interested people. The agricultural advisory group appears to be a logical group; however they should have the assistance of the agriculture teacher, administrator, and other consultants such as soil conservation personnel, extension specialists in rural sociology and agriculture, and education specialists.

Once a proper analysis and interpretation of information has been made it will be the duty of the board of education, administrator, agriculture teacher, and agriculture advisory group to propose policies from which to replan the program of agricultural education so as to serve all who need agricultural education. Policies will be made by the board. The more detailed aspects of replanning are likely to fall to the teacher of agriculture. The agricultural advisory group, and other specialists and consultants may be called upon for specific aid, or suggestions.

The tasks of deciding who should receive agricultural education and learning the agricultural education needs of the various groups to be reached are far from simple tasks. Comprehensive, well planned methods employing refined techniques, procedures, and devices are needed.

VITA

Gerald Blaine James was born at Oakboro, North Carolina, November 24, 1922. He received his elementary and high school education in the Oakboro Public Schools. He enrolled in Wake Forest College, Wake Forest, North Carolina in September, 1939 and entered North Carolina State College of the University of North Carolina in September, 1940. He served in the United States Army from April, 1943 through May, 1946.

He re-entered North Carolina State College in June, 1946 and completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science Degree in Agricultural Education. The degree was conferred in June, 1947 with honors. He entered the Graduate School of the same institution in September, 1946 and was awarded the Master of Science Degree in Agricultural Education in June, 1948.

He became teacher of vocational agriculture at Millbrook High School, Millbrook, North Carolina in December, 1947. He was a supervisor of student teachers during the 1949 and 1950 school years.

In January, 1950 he became Editor of the *Wake Farmers' News* and Field Service Representative for the Wake Farmers' Cooperative, Raleigh, North Carolina.

He entered the Graduate College of the University of Illinois in September, 1950. He served as a Research Assistant in Agricultural Education during the 1951-1952 school year.

In September, 1952 he joined the faculty of North Carolina State College as Assistant Professor of Agricultural Education, the position he now holds.